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XV.—SHELLEY'S SWELL-FOOT THE TYRANT IN
RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL
SATIRES

Few readers of Shelley devote much time to *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or *Swell-foot the Tyrant*, and for a very good reason. Intrinsically, the play is not worth it. Mrs. Shelley, ever careful of the poet's reputation, warns us not to take this piece for more than was meant. We are indebted for its inception, and for some of its devices, to the grunting of a drove of pigs beneath Shelley's window. This fact, notwithstanding what we owe to equally trivial experiences persistently reported of Newton and Dick Whittington, adds nothing to the gravity with which the poem is generally read. The revolting setting, with its thigh-bones and skulls, the outrageous characters introduced, such as a sow-gelder, a chorus of swine, and a hoydenish queen, together with extravagant speeches and actions, sometimes in a serious mood of protest, more often with the hysteric sort of grotesquerie which was Shelley's nearest approach to humor—these factors have combined to make most readers regard the poem as a failure even when taken for no more than was meant. Shelley's serious devotion to liberty could never allow him to treat it in burlesque fashion without a touch of hectic incongruity. Byron could have succeeded much better with Shelley's material, and Fielding could have made an uproarious farce of it, but not Shelley.

Shelley's oft-quoted remark, "You might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me," has a superficial application to *Swell-foot*—one feels that Shelley is not sufficiently humane to be genuinely humorous. In another sense, however, this remark, as well as Trelawney's romantic picture of Shel-

ley's solitary habits of composing, is misleading. Nothing can be more true in general than the common impression of Shelley's isolation from humanity; yet that he was always beating his wings in the void is not strictly true. He was sufficiently aware of the multitude, for example, in his desire to get *Hellas* off the press in time to take advantage of the popular interest in Greece, and, as this article shall attempt to show, he was not only interested in the great Caroline scandal, which brought him into intellectual communion with all the aristocrats, radicals and bourgeois of England, but he was sufficiently in touch with the numerous anonymous cartoons and political satires on the subject to put out a satire of his own remarkably like them in tone, incident, and general paraphernalia.

There is nothing remarkable, of course, in the fact that Shelley, in his Italian seclusion, was touched by the Caroline affair. When Queen Caroline, travelling peacefully and somewhat unconventionally over the earth, tired of the petty persecutions of her royal consort and decided to embarrass him by returning to England to assert her rights, she started a furore the like of which had never been seen in English domestic politics since the time of the Popish Plot. The ministers, in trying her before Parliament for infidelity, were attacking not only the honor of the Queen, such as it was, but the influence of her supporters, the Whigs. The Whigs, in lampooning George IV as Nero, Glorious Geordie and Gorgeous Whelp, were not only "defending the honor of the Queen"; they were assailing the whole Tory government as well. Ministers were mobbed, processions were formed, houses were stoned, and foreign witnesses were assaulted on landing. Brougham was moved to suggest that certain days be set apart for transacting the business of the country. Wherever English newspapers and travellers went it was incumbent upon all good

Englishmen to pronounce upon the question of the Queen's virtue. Byron scouted the charges; Scott thought her guilty; Shelley believed her guilty only of grave indiscretions and of being "a vulgar cook-maid." That Shelley added his mite to the literature of the question is not so strange, therefore, as the similarity of his treatment to that of the many other satirists with whose work it is somewhat difficult for us to believe Shelley familiar, without modifying our ideas of his Italian seclusion.

This similarity can best be demonstrated under two heads—the similarity of machinery, setting and idea, and the similarity in the treatment of the Queen's enemies. The latter similarity will enable us to establish the identity of Shelley's characters somewhat more fully and certainly than has been done hitherto. Incidentally such a demonstration, if convincing, should serve as a mild corrective of certain exaggerated ideas about the completeness with which Shelley "dwelt apart," and help us to regard a highly abnormal character as a bit more human than Trelawney and Hogg liked to picture it.

Partly on account of the ephemeral nature of the numerous satires on the Caroline affair and partly on account of the fact that most of them, for perfectly valid reasons, were anonymous, it is probably impossible at this time to tell just how numerous they were. That they were both numerous and popular, however, is sufficiently evident from the fact that the Harvard Library contains forty-three verse and prose satires and sixty cartoons on George IV, dealing mainly with the Caroline affair.¹ Some of

¹ Other cartoons and satires are reproduced, quoted, or mentioned by title in J. F. Molloy's *Court Life Below Stairs*, iv, 315 pp., Lewis Melville's *An Injured Queen*, II, 473, and Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, II, 346, footnote. The note by Professor Dowden which is quoted herewith, is the only reference to these satires by writers on Shelley:

them went into as many as fifty editions. Among the writers and authors whose names are best known today may be mentioned William Hone, the radical publisher, Theodore Hook, the Tory editor of *John Bull*, and George Cruikshank.

In nearly all this literature the symbolical green bag figures prominently. Historical accounts of the trial show that the documents of the prosecution were carried in one of the green bags in common use by lawyers at the time and abandoned soon afterward, as Melville informs us, because of the infamy attached to them through these very proceedings. The Green Bag became a catchword in the speeches of counsel before the House of Lords and in the newspaper accounts and comments. Sympathizers of the Queen carried green bags on long poles in their procession.² Very few of the satires and cartoons in the Harvard Library fail to mention the green bag, and many of them center everything around it. Shelley's satire resembles the others not merely in the *fact* of using this Green Bag, which would not be a very unnatural coincidence in itself, but in the *manner* of using it. Shelley makes prominent use of the Green Bag as a device on the part of the King's counsellors to ruin the Queen. It is filled with poison and is to be emptied over the head of the unsuspecting Queen, who is to be deceived into thinking it a fair test. At the last moment, however, the Queen snatches the bag and empties its contents over the heads of her persecutors.

"The Rat and the Leech of Shelley's drama were common property of the pamphleteers and versemongers. See the picture in which these vermin feed on John Bull's corpse and on the Tree of Liberty in 'The Queen and Magna Charta' (Dolby, 1820)." It is evident from this that Dodwen did not perceive the full significance of the relationship.

*Toynbee, *Glimpses of the Twenties*, p. 49. See also Melville, *An Injured Queen*, II, 511.

A cartoon called *Opening the Green Bag, or the Fiends of Hell Let Loose*, represents the conspirators being routed by the dragons and serpents in the bag. Another cartoon, called *The Filth and Lies of the Green Bag visiting their Parents and Friends*, shows the Green Bag full of reptiles being poured over the heads of its owners. Either of these cartoons, by changing serpents to poison, might serve as an illustration to Shelley's scene. Leigh Hunt, in the *Examiner* of June 9, actually does make this change, when he speaks of Caroline's servants being tampered with, "thus to gather poison for one of those venomous Green Bags, which have so long infected and nauseated the people and are now to infect the Queen." The following titles which are representative of a great many more, may give an additional idea of the use of the Green Bag in the cartoons: *The Hampshire Green Bag Opened, A Peep into the Green Bag* (June 1820), *The Green Bag*, (July 11, 1820), *A New Italian Farce, called the Green Bag*, (July 22, 1820), *The Rats at Work, or How to Get Out of the Bag* (August, 1820). The following excerpts show its use in the prose and verse.

In "*Non Mi Ricordo*," (Oct. 8, 1820), Majocchi, one of the infamous Italian witnesses against the Queen is made to say

If a green bag you want full,
To fill it I am your man.

In *The Dream* (1820) the King, "musing on Green Bags and Leeches" says, "I saw Live-a-fool [Lord Liverpool] dragged through a horse-pond and the water was tainted. I saw a Leech sucking his blood and a Cook feasting on his carcass. I saw poor Fred in a Green Bag," etc. *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, (1820), the illustrations of which are by Cruikshank, which went through numerous editions, contains the following:

See the rat Leech turn toward Milan's walls,
 "Till the black slime betrays him as he crawls,"
 Sees from that recreant, vile and eunuch land,
 Where fellow perjurers hold their market stand,
 Cooke, with his "cheek of parchment, eye of stone"
 Get up the evidence to go well down;
 Sees who, with eager hands the Green Bag cram, etc.

and proceeds to a coronation scene in which Cooke is crowned with the Green Bag by Castlereagh and another minister.

One more example will serve to show, incidentally, the boldness and scurrility of many of these pamphleteers. In the twenty-seventh edition of *Non Mi Ricordo* (1820) occurs this "Advertisement":

LOST, STRAYED OR STOLEN.³

An infirm, elderly gentleman in a Public Office lately left his home just after dreadfully ill using his wife about half-a-crown and trying to beat her. He had long complained a good deal about his forehead and lately had a leech put upon him. He was last seen walking swiftly toward the Horns without a crown to his hat, accompanied by some evil-disposed persons, who tied a great green bag to his tail full of crackers, which he mistook for sweetmeats and burnt himself dreadfully," etc.

The article hints that he may lose his position if not careful, as one of his predecessors did. Not until January 9, 1821, did the King write to Eldon⁴ urging action to suppress these lampooners. These conditions must have been sorely perplexing to Leigh Hunt, imprisoned earlier for slandering the Regent.

The air was so full of green bags during this period, however, that Shelley's use of the Green Bag in the manner cited would not establish an indubitable connection between Shelley's poem and the various lampoons of the

³ Quoted as "Strayed and Missing" in Molloy, *op. cit.*, iv, 321.

⁴ Twiss's *Life of Lord Eldon*, 11, 280.

year. The use of this symbol might conceivably have been suggested to Shelley through other channels, though it is rather hard to explain the similarity to *Opening the Green Bag* and *The Filth and Lies of the Green Bag* as mere coincidence. There are other factors, however, that establish a more convincing connection. At this point it must be remarked that any connection established is evidence of borrowing on Shelley's part rather than that of the lampooners. Most of the contemporary satires antedate *Swell-foot*, which is known to have been begun August 24 and published in December, and it is known that only seven copies of *Swell-foot* were sold before the poem was withdrawn from publication.⁵

Perhaps Shelley's most striking scene is the conclusion scene in the Temple of Famine, where Caroline seizes the Green Bag, empties it over her persecutors, who are immediately transformed into foul beasts and put to flight, while Caroline rides off in triumph on the back of a Minotaur. This scene has considerable similarity to a cartoon, *A Kick Up in a Great House*, published in August, 1820. Caroline is here riding a snorting, kicking bull and calling "Justice," while the Archbishop, King and counsellors are fleeing in panic and the table is overturned, spilling the contents of the Green Bag, which are labelled Horse Leech, Italian dagger, Milan Commission, and Bill of Pains and Penalties.

In style and manner, also, there are similarities. Like his contemporaries, Shelley published anonymously and in pamphlet form. Shelley's burlesque erudition and his punning etymologies in the Advertisement and in the use of Iona Taurina and the Ionian Minotaur have their parallels in the much more clever use of the same methods by Theodore Hook in *Tentamen* (undated) and in such ex-

⁵ Woodberry, *Shelley's Poetical Works*, III, 470, 474.

pressions as the following, from *The Acts of Adonis the Great*:⁶ "And they called him re-gent, which in the Bullish language signifies 'No longer blackguard.'" The following, from *A Speech From the Throne*, which reached its fifty-first edition in 1821 and was so well known by Jan. 26, 1820 that the Company of Stationers were demanding extra copies, bears a general resemblance in tone to Swell-foot's speeches:

Reform, reform, the swinish rabble cry,
Meaning of course, rebellion, blood and riot.
Audacious rascals! you, my Lords, and I
Know 'tis their duty to be starved in quiet.

With Shelley the rabble were actually swine, in form as well as in nature.

There is a general correspondence in the ideas and characters treated. Shelley attacks the spy evil, the paper money evil, the callousness of the government to the people's sufferings, the corruption of Justice, the repressive measures of the government, and the characters of the King and ministers. All these ideas are paralleled in the other satires. The same people are attacked by both Shelley and the pamphleteers, and in a strikingly similar manner. They are agreed on obesity, dullness, heartlessness, gluttony and lechery of the King, the cynical deceit and corruption of Castlereagh, the reactionary character of Liverpool, the brutality of Wellington, the cant and lachrymosity of Eldon, and the injustice of all these men toward Caroline and the cause of liberty. The radical pamphleteers also attack the Italian witnesses against Caroline and the famous Milan Commission appointed to investigate the Queen's conduct. It will appear later that Shelley is in agreement with them on the Milan Commission.

⁶ Molloy, *op. cit.*, iv, 319.

The resemblance in the characters is close enough to enable us to identify nearly all of Shelley's characters by comparison with other satires in which they appear under their own names.

The identity of Swell-foot with George IV, Iona Taurina with Caroline, the Ionian Minotaur with John Bull, and the Swine with the people is so evident from the play itself that it is taken for granted by even the casual reader and therefore requires no demonstration. It is generally agreed also, from their parallel functions in the play and in George's government, that Purganax is Lord Castlereagh; Laoktonos, Wellington; and Dakry, Lord Eldon. All these characters appear in the contemporary satires in much the same light as in *Swell-foot*, and often together. Shelley's picture of Eldon's canting tearfulness is no more graphic, for instance, than the lines in *Royal Rumping*, in which, "Bewigged, begowned, bewildered, weeping," he is described as one who

Would damn his Q . . . n and with a sigh,
Damn her again and, whimpering, cry.

Since these characters are generally accepted in the ascribed meanings, it is not worth while to go into detailed quotations in order to establish their identity.

The characters as yet undetermined are Mammon, Arch-Priest of Famine, who fills one of the principal rôles in *Swell-foot*; the Gadfly, the Leech, and the Rat, agents of the ministers, especially of Purganax (Castlereagh) in persecuting Iona; and Moses, Solomon and Zephaniah, respectively the Sow-Gelder, Porkman and Pig-butcher, to whom Swell-foot delivers his swinish subjects, and who are minor characters in the play.

John Todhunter,⁷ the only writer who considers Mam-

⁷ *A Study of Shelley's Poetry*, p. 207.

mon's identity, says that it is equally likely that Mammon may be Lord Liverpool, Vansittart, Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, but that "he is probably as much a type of English politics as a particular person." As a matter of fact, there can be small doubt that Mammon is Liverpool. In the play, Mammon is Arch-Priest and apparently the superior of Purganax and Looktonos. This corresponds to Liverpool's position as Prime Minister. It is Mammon who first produces the Green Bag and proposes the test; it was Liverpool⁸ who laid the Green Bag on the table at the opening of the proceedings by the House of Lords, and it was he who proposed the Bill of Pains and Penalties against Caroline. In the proceedings of the Lords as reported by Nightingale,⁹ Liverpool's part was a prominent one throughout the whole trial. He is also mentioned in many of the satires and cartoons as one of the principal persecutors of Queen and people; e. g. in *Royal Rumping* (1821), *A New Italian Farce Called the Green Bag, Doll Tear-Sheet, etc.* There is nothing in the play itself to suggest either Vansittart or Sidmouth as Mammon. Both were extremely unpopular with the radicals, and were attacked in some of the current satires, but their part in this literature and in the proceedings of the trial is insignificant in comparison to that of Liverpool.

No other explanation for the Gadfly, the Leech and the Rat has yet been offered than that of Todhunter,¹⁰ who considers them abstractions to represent Slander, Taxation, and Espionage respectively. Were there no other explana-

⁸ Mrs. Shelley in her Note to the poem (1839) erroneously says Castlereagh, but see Harriet Martineau: *History of the Peace*, Book ii, chapter ii.

⁹ *Trial of Queen Caroline*, 3 vol. 1820.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, 206, 8.

tion to propose, this surmise of Todhunter's would break down on account of the fact that there is no distinct difference between the functions of the three to support such a distinction in meaning. Moreover, Shelley has obviously invented them as plagues for Caroline, not the people; and Taxation, as one of Caroline's plagues, is altogether inappropriate. Dowden's footnote, already quoted, suggested the clue to these characters, had any one wished to follow it up.

The Rat and the Leech are indeed stock properties of the contemporary satires. Rats are mentioned in *A Political Lecture on Tails* (1820), *The Political Showman at Home* (1821, 26th edition), *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder* (1820), *Royal Rumping* (1821), *A Political Christmas Carol* (1821), *The Rats at Work* (1820), and a number of others. Some of the passages already quoted in connection with the Green Bag are fair examples of the use of the Leech and the Rat by contemporary satirists. Numerous others could be quoted, but it is hardly necessary. In practically every case the meaning of the word rat is that given in most slang dictionaries, "a political turncoat and deserter."¹¹

The Leech is even more commonly mentioned than rats. It occurs in *A Political Lecture on Tails* (1820), *Royal Rumping* (1821), *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder* (1820), *The Queen that Jack Found* (1820), and in the cartoons *The Kettle Calling the Pot Ugly Names* (1820), *A New Italian Farce called the Green Bag* (1820), *A Kick Up in a Great House* (1820), and *The Dream* (1820).

It may now be plainly seen that Shelley is in close accord with the other political satirists of the day in mak-

¹¹ Farmer and Henry: *Slang and its Analogues*, etc.

ing use of the Rat and Leech, as well as in his use of the Green Bag. Whether or not he owes the Gadfly to the same source cannot be definitely stated. The only instance noted in which the word seems to have a significance in the satires of the times is in an allusion to Sidmouth as "the devil of traps and beaks and gadflies and eavesdroppers."¹² It seems more likely that Shelley imported this figure from the Greek story of Io and the Gadfly, which was fresh in his mind from *Prometheus Bound*. Purganax, in fact, says: "The gadfly was the same which Juno sent To agitate Io."¹³ The plaguing of the wandering Io is an obvious parallel to that of the wandering Caroline; the Greek form and names of the drama would naturally suggest a Greek parallel, and Shelley needed a new symbol in addition to the two already suggested by the contemporary lampoons, because, as will appear later, he probably had three men definitely in mind.

If Shelley followed contemporary satires in the meaning put upon these figures, then we can reach fairly certain conclusions as to their identity. The Leech is undoubtedly Vice Chancellor Leach, the organizer of the nefarious Milan Commission. This is established by the frequent spelling Leach, with the capital, where, if no allusion were intended, the common noun, leech, would be used; by the frequent appearance of the Leech with the well-known wigged head of the Vice-Chancellor,¹⁴ and by the verbal description of Leach, in his human character with the attributes of the Vice-Chancellor.¹⁵ His part in the "per-

¹² *A Slap at Slop*, 1822, p. 26.

¹³ I, 152.

¹⁴ Toynbee, *op. cit.* p. 66.

¹⁵ See *Royal Rumping*, p. 14, *Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, *John Bull Peppering the Italian Rascals*, (cartoon) *The Queen that Jack Found*, etc.

secution" of the Queen was so well known that when Othello was being played at Drury Lane during the trial, Emilia's lines "I will be hanged if some eternal villain" etc. "hath not devised this slander," were greeted with a tempest of hoots for the Vice Chancellor.¹⁶ Both his part in the actual proceedings and his place in the pamphlets and cartoons make it extremely unlikely that Shelley, in satirizing the same events after the same general manner as the other political satires, should adopt the figure of the Leech without adopting its meaning. When in addition to this we note that Shelley's treatment of the Leech is in general similar to that in the other satires, and that it is consistent with the part played by the Vice-Chancellor in the actual events, we may safely conclude that Shelley's Leech is Sir John Leach, Vice-Chancellor, and organizer of the Milan Commission.

Shelley's treatment of the Rat, the Gadfly and the Leech together as agents in persecuting Iona, suggests that he may have meant the Gadfly and the Rat for the other prominent English members of the Milan Commission. These two men were William Cooke, a lawyer of good reputation, and Lieut. Col. Browne, of rather shady character.¹⁷ Both were well known as agents of Castlereagh against Caroline and the names of both figured prominently in the proceedings of the trial and in the contemporary satires. Browne is mentioned in *Doll Tear-Sheet* (1820), *Political Lecture on Tails* (1820), and *Gorgeous Whelp* (1820). Cooke is mentioned in *Tentamen*, *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*

¹⁶ Toynbee, *op. cit.* p. 66.

¹⁷ Two solicitors, a Mr. Powell of London and Vimercati of Milan, were used in the taking of evidence, but they were less conspicuous in both trial and satires than Browne and Cooke. Lewis Melville: *An Injured Queen*, II, 389-96.

(1820), *Doll Tearsheet* (1820) and a number of cartoons, including *Falstaff and His Ragged Crew* (1820), *The Cauldron* (1820), *The Dream*, (1820), *A Peep into the Green Bag* (1820), and *The Royal Rush Light* (1821). In several of the preceding instances and in a number of others, the Milan Commission is specifically attacked. In some instances Cooke and Browne are mentioned together; and in other instances they are mentioned in connection with Leach. In Shelley's drama *Purganax* says his Green Bag is filled with "the Gadfly's venom," "the vomit of the Leech" and "black ratsbane."¹⁸ The contemporary satires prescribe an exactly similar function for the members of the Milan Commission. The passage quoted earlier from *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder* (1820) represents Leach and Cooke as gathering evidence to cram the Green Bag; in *Doll Tear-Sheet* (1820) one of the witnesses is made to say that she received instructions from "the Cook who has given me lessons in English, a certain Colonel Blue, and a very black attorney"; and in the cartoon, *Falstaff and his Ragged Regiment*, the Italian witness, Ompteda, and a kangaroo wearing a collar marked Cook are carrying the bag of evidence between them. In *A Political Lecture on Tails* (1820) the King, as Gorgeous Whelp, is made to sing,

"She wants to crack my crown,
I'll go to Colonel B . . . n."

In the same satire it is said that "Some time back the Ha . . . r rat [George himself, who had "ratted" from his earlier Whig sympathies] dispatched the Brown rat and some of that species to Italy,"; and in *The Queen that Jack Found* (July, 1820), Leach is presented as a horse-leech, "a time-serving barrator," etc., who "filled his Green Bag with the tales of his spies."

¹⁸ I, 352 ff.

When we consider therefore, the certain identity of Shelley's Leech and Sir John Leach, head of the Milan Commission, the fact that the Milan Commission played an important part in the actual events of the scandal and in the contemporary satires; and the further facts that the functions of Shelley's trio are the same as those of the known members of the Milan Commission in the contemporary satires and that Shelley's general connection with these satires has already been established, there can scarcely be any further doubt that Shelley is attacking the members of the Milan Commission.

The remaining unidentified characters—Solomon, Zephaniah and Moses—have no discoverable parallels in the other satires of the day. Todhunter's suggestion that they may be, respectively, Rothschild, physical force, and the Malthusians is as good a guess as any, but one may doubt whether these characters were intended to represent real persons.

A comparison of Shelley's drama with the contemporary satires therefore, establishes certain hitherto unrecognized facts: it shows that Shelley borrowed largely from his anonymous contemporaries in both manner and idea, and it establishes definite originals for the characters of Mammon, the Leach, the Gadfly, and the Rat in the persons of Liverpool, Leach, Cooke and Browne. From a more general point of view, it shows that the unworldly lover of Emilia Viviani, the solitary and abstracted poet of Trelawney's *Recollections*, was sufficiently interested in the things of this world to acquire a surprising familiarity with the fugitive literature of a national scandal.

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